

South Carolina Department of Agriculture . . .

Hugh Weathers, Commissioner of Agriculture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – June 2, 2008

\$400 rebate available for SC fresh produce growers, packers, & wholesalers

COLUMBIA, SC – Food safety is on the minds of everyone. In order to assure product safety, many produce buyers now require or soon will require growers, packers, and shippers to participate in a Good Agricultural Practice and Good Handling Practice Food Safety Audit.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) jointly issued a guidance document for the fresh fruit and vegetable industry that provided general guidelines for reducing the possibility of contamination of fresh produce by microbial organisms. As a result of requests from customers, primarily shippers and growers, an independent third party audit-based service was established.

In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the South Carolina Department of Agriculture's Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Service offers the official USDA audit that follows produce from the field, through the packing house, and on to the wholesale level.

To encourage participation in the program, the SC Department of Agriculture is now offering a \$400 rebate to participants to defray the cost of the program.

Commissioner Weathers said, "Our grading and inspection team is always looking for ways to provide services that will benefit the industry – and this is a worthwhile effort to benefit buyers and sellers. Through the program, our Fruit and Vegetable Grading and Inspection team is helping growers, packers, and shippers demonstrate that they adhered to generally recognized good agricultural practices and good handling practices guidelines when the audit was performed. The results of the audit are considered valid for one calendar year."

For a limited time, the Department of Agriculture is offering a \$400 rebate only towards this USDA audit fee. For more information about the audit and the \$400 rebate, growers, packers, and shippers should contact Jack M. Dantzler, Director of Inspection and Grading and Market News, 803-737-4597.

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